the eel deal
WAHOO WAR ICE CREAM YEAR PASS

THE EEL DEAL

THE ZINE ALL ABOUT FRYE!

Welcome to the Eel Deal Zine
We hope you enjoy our collection of Frye works
we have created in honor of our beloved idol!

Frye
17

PIG
DEMON
ART

DAYBREAKER
ANTHEM
(DEEP CUT)

TRUSTY alt
I was flying!
That's not how I remember it...

!
START!!
!GROOVED DOWN!
?
GO!GO!
GO!
!!
TWIST!
TURN!
LET'S DANCE!
END!

ERYS: ALTERNA

SPLATOON SINS KIS SET 0S&T

02.

CATALOG

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TSVILLE IDOL OF THE YEAR INTERVIEW WITH FRYE ONAGA - SPECIAL INSIDER EDITION

DEEP CUT FRYE

STAY FRESH
NEW SEASON
CATALOGUE OUT NOW

CHECK OUT THE LATEST
DEEP CUT SINGLE

HAVING TROUBLE CHOOSING YOUR SPLATFEST TEAM?
M THEME ANNOUNCED THIS WEEK

LATEST SCANDAL
GRIZZCO INDUSTRIES
ED AGAIN OVER POOR
ORKING CONDITIONS

tipsytrains

#1
WIN

WE'LL GET 'EM
NEXT TIME!!

BONBON
de
CITRON

Drawn'til Dawn

Shiv
U RdY?

ヒトカラ

♪ Smeared Canvas / Deep Cut

HAPPY HOLI

VOTE
TEAM
ERZE!!
SKILLED FUTIST!
SCHOOL MUSICIAN!
THE FEARLESS FUN LOVING SPLATCAST HOST!
SPLATS HER ENEMIES!
AND SPLATS THEM AGAIN!
AND AGAIN!
THE EEL DEAL!!

TEAM
GRUB!

!?
FOR ME?

PERFECT!
GREAT
GREAT

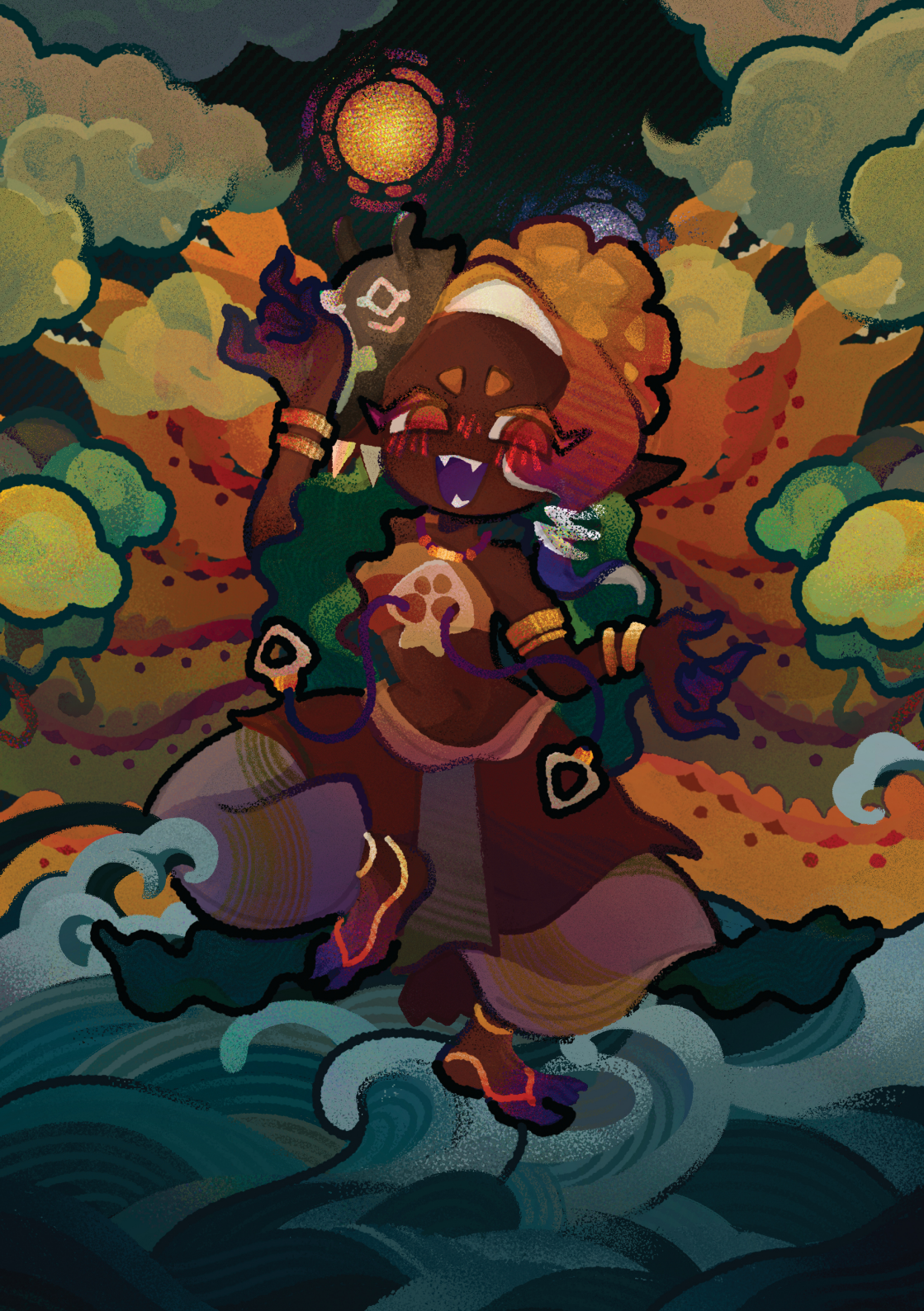
PSYCHIC TRAINER FRYE
WANTS TO BATTLE!

LET'S GO
TEAM ALIEN!

Mcpippypants

333

FRYE SWEEP
FRYE
I LOVE YOU !!! FRYE SWEEP
FRYE YOU ARE THE LOVE OF MY LIFE
LET'S GO
FRYE SWEEP
GO
I ♥ FRYE !!!!



LITERATURE

A fancy way to call our fanfiction section!

A Recipe for Anarchy

story by yumeparadox | art by gummymela

7 A.M.

Frye's mornings begin with a healthy dose of organized chaos—unpredictable for everyone except her closest friends in the entire world, Shiver and Big Man. Experimenting with new forms of self-care at the start of each day, whilst on a fixed schedule, is the most freedom she has now that Deep Cut is under new management. It's those small acts that keep her motivated—helps her wade through the unfamiliar waters of working with a talent agency for the first time.

This Friday, at 7 PM, Frye's up at the crack of dawn to make miso soup for breakfast, her tentacles tied up with a soft scrunchie that juxtaposes how rough and tumble her workout gear looks—frayed blue sweatpants and a loose, knitted crop top that's seen better days but she just can't bring herself to recycle it.

After skillfully fastening bandage wraps around her hands, she tiptoes through the narrow wooden hallways of her shared apartment, careful not to wake her band mates snoozing down the hall.

In their earlier days, Deep Cut spent Friday nights (or as Shiver would affectionately call them, Frye-day nights) songwriting, or hitting up the local arcade when it felt like that window of inspiration remained shut. As long as the three of them were together, they could take on the challenge of any genre and brew something worthwhile by the end of their session.

Now though, Frye worries the process won't be as liberating and that they'd given up their indie status too soon. Whether it's just an uneven mix of anticipation and anxiety, she'll have to push it down to make room for success. What if everything went right instead?

8 A.M.

Frye shuffles through her liked songs on Splatify, feeling mildly irritated at her indecisiveness. The mornings are hers to spend as she decides and she doesn't want to waste one more second while the sweltering desert heat rises. High Tide Era drums greet her ears in the next couple of minutes.

As a weathered splatana enthusiast, Frye relishes the fact that practicing her favorite weapon is something that will never get old. She opens her reliable stamper case—adorned with stickers from various bands and neighboring city gift shops—resting her eyes upon the sword-like device.

Frye lifts it with ease, smiles and readies her stance. In a flash, her feet are rushing across the cool surface of the lobby floor; she alternates between vertical and horizontal slashes.

With each forward motion of her weapon, she imagines she's striking down faceless foes. They're faceless, anonymous rather, but they take the form of inkfish who left hateful comments online about their music and random city dwellers who were rude to her in the past. Although it's not something Frye prefers to dwell on, it's cathartic in a sense.

A flurry of orange hued ink splashes up towards the ceiling as she finds herself attempting a midair attack. Through the expansive windows of the building, the ink ribbons are tinted by Splatsville's morning sunrise in a way she hasn't quite experienced before—it's purely invigorating.

She's catching her breath now, finding her way to the nearby Crab and Go stall for a refreshment. Usually, Frye would save splatana practice for the evenings to unwind from the day; now she feels a new sense of fulfillment in switching it up and stopping to appreciate the mundane.

10 A.M.

At approximately ten in the morning, Shiver, Frye and Big Man are seated

before their camera crew since most Splatsville citizens are late to rise. The commute hadn't been horrendous thanks to a developing transportation system, which gave Shiver plenty of time to consult with their makeup artists.

Frye agrees that it's important not to change their image too drastically from the Deep Cut they were in primary school, so she declines new suggestions for her mascara and fancy skin products like bronzer. There are so many promises of new sponsors thrown at them left and right—perhaps since it's their first week on set. Frye knows better though, from her folks, to not appear so naive.

"Let's go for my signature look! I love wearing yellow and it'll represent Team Paper just fine!" She says, raising her hands in a persuasive gesture. Thankfully, it works and within moments she's applying her own caramel colored lip liner, topping it with clear gloss.

Five minutes are left to spare. She gives Big Man a high fin touch as they head to the stage to take their seats—watches as he settles around their television screen and Shiver kneels down behind the wooden podium next to her.

3 P.M.

After filming their first Anarchy Splatcast session, Frye finds herself wandering the halls of their new office. The unfamiliarity of the space settles slowly into her mind like an approaching ink storm, lingering just beyond thoughts brought on by impostor syndrome. Yes, she deserves to be here. *Everything is just unfolding so fast*, she thinks.

To combat the feeling, Frye calls Shiver up so that they can meet for lunch together with Big Man. Long gone are the days of huddling over shared okonomiyaki from a nearby food truck with sheet music on the floor—their weekdays would look a lot different from the confines of their tatami-laden stage.

Change being the only constant in life is something Frye understands well, having moved closer to Splatsville years ago to make a name for herself. She already misses her family and taking care of her eels even if they were a mere train ride away.

Shiver's voice feels like a warm blanket draped over her shoulders once she answers the call; Frye found herself letting go of tension she didn't even know was there. "Hey Fry-Fry, how are you holding up?"

"Honestly? Super nervous and hungry as heck. Where do you wanna swap plates?"

Shiver lets out a loud cough. "Oh, we're doing that today?! I might have accidentally added spicy kimchi into my mix. If that's okay…"

Frye only laughed, volume high and playful. "I don't prefer it but Big Man's probably the only one who can't handle it. It's cool. Also… I kinda wish I hadn't warmed up my stuff near the office. No one said anything but they kept giving me weird stares as I packed everything back up and I don't know what's worse, really."

"They did not! I mean, it's not like the room is off limits to us, right?"

"Shiv, I think it's the other thing. People have said my cooking smells off-putting before." Frye grumbles, stopping to stare at a passing airplane.

She taps her foot against the ground impatiently and in annoyance. Memories she would rather not have resurface threaten to spill into her consciousness—save for one: which is Shiver stepping in front of her in their middle school hallway, haphazardly shielding Frye from two unruly students. It was cute; the octoling knew she could deal with them easily but Shiver didn't think twice about standing up for her new friend. She knew they would get along from that day forward.

The irony was that Big Man thought *Shiver and Frye* were bullies when they first met. Shiver's fighting spirit was on display once again as they both convinced him that his piano skills were a worthy asset to their group. It was Frye who was the mediator, promising to keep an eye out for him on the school grounds if he agreed to join. Hard to believe he was so much shorter than the girls back then.

Shiver scoffs on the other line. "Well then, whoever they are…clearly they have zero taste. Don't let it get to you Frye, I'm pretty sure we can just file a complaint later."

A whisper of a smirk crossed Frye's face. "Starting trouble in the first week already, love that for us."

"Better believe it. Big Man just got here, wanna meet us on the stairwell? I'd rather enjoy the cloudier weather we're getting."

Frye nodded before giving a verbal response. "Let's party!"

5 P.M.

Several meetings with executives and invites to fancy dinners later, Frye and Big Man found themselves heading off to a recording session (Shiver had kakegoe practice). Few things soothe the soul quite like belting out a familiar harmony. Finally, the last task of the day is here—recording vocals for their splatfest debut. Frye finds herself absentmindedly swaying to the rhythm of her Anarchy Poisons solo as the track loops for a third time.

The booming, eclectic drums mirror her heartbeat, which picks up its rate when she hears something about "another take, more emphasis on her final notes" from a small speaker in the corner of the recording room. It hasn't escaped Frye that this track needs to be perfect.

When Deep Cut was approached to make Anarchy Rainbow the next big fest anthem, their sound team gave heavy focus to Frye and mentioned how the intro of the song would later mirror her solo performance. Anarchy Rainbow united the diaspora, while the Anarchy Poisons were written and developed with a singular focus on the varying cultural backgrounds of Deep Cut.

Big Man cheers and waves his fins from the other side of the glass in the sound engineer's booth. Frye holds her headphones up to a pointed ear with one hand as the song restarts. "Deep breaths, Onaga. You got this."

She focuses on her single *svara,* elevating her vocals and holding the note. Frye finds herself in harmony, in a swirling dance with the *shehnai* (a wooden flute sounding instrument) and hypnotic, electronic synths in the backing track—her most favorite elements. Frye feels like she's floating until the music ends.

When she receives a text from her grandparents telling her how proud they are that she's made it through her first day as a signed artist, Frye holds back tears of joy and pride; she'll let them out later.

Instead, the cheerful inkling rejoices. "I'm gonna make everyone proud! Just wait!"

7 P.M.

The day is slowly unwinding as Splatsville's scenic sunset dips beyond the monorail and skyline. From dawn to dusk, Frye's day has been nothing short of exhilarating. Sure, there were a few missteps and uncomfortable moments but it was inevitable in this line of work.

Her bandmates find themselves propped against the railing of the city's highest elevation. The scarlet tinged clouds above look straight out of a storybook painting, reminding her of their middle school days hanging out on the rooftop to sing.

After raiding nearby vending machines for canned refreshments, Shiver plops down on a bench next to the rest of the trio. She throws a can to both Frye and Big Man.

"So gang, are we ready for the next big photoshoot in a week?"

The first official splatfest (after debut) for Deep Cut is Gear vs. Grub vs. Fun, a theme based on what would be most important to take to a deserted island. Frye can see herself surrounded by savory meals and sweet treats already—whether or not they'll be able to take anything off set to enjoy is a question for another evening. The simple thought makes her chuckle.

Big Man nods and hums. "(Ay! Ay.) I can't wait! We have such a packed week, guess this is what it's like being a real celebrity."

Frye laughs breathily in response. "Yeah, so much Anarchy Rainbow practice. No more sleeping in for a while, huh? At least for y'all."

"(Ay..) You're lucky you love the mornings...." Big Man teases.

Off-key melodies pass by from the neighborhood children folk singing in nearby apartments, carried along by the sudden breeze. This Friday, at 7 PM, Frye sets her sights on the floats being constructed below them and sighs in relief, taking a sip of her mango soda afterwards. Even in a city of chaos, this moment is serene; it's the perfect prelude to the upcoming storm. She's beyond excited for the hurricane of a year ahead, so long as her closest friends in the entire world are by her side.

A Victory by Any Other Name

story by ShiverHohojiro | art by Fruitjuus

Frye wriggles impatiently in the entryway of her and Shiver's home, eyeing the hall they'd be emerging from any second now. It's been an hour already! She's ready to *go!!* How is she supposed to do literally anything else when they were about to add *Amateur Cryptid Hunters* to Deep Cut's resume!?

There's a duffle bag chock-full of snacks at her feet, easy meals for a night of cryptid stakeouts. It's conspicuously absent of anything that might be considered "gear"; she's got her phone on her, sure, and a couple other things you couldn't leave the house without - keys, wallet, Splatana… but Shiver's responsible for packing their equipment, just as Frye's responsible for bringing food. She trusts them to remember everything she'd forget, like sea-cucumber phone chargers and her meds - but she's not so sure she can trust them to remember to feed themself.

And what a feast she's prepared! Candy bars, quick snacks, chocolate in all three flavors; a variety of energy bars from sweet to savory; juices, milks, and teas that didn't need refrigeration until opening; self-cooking spicy and non-spicy Anarchy Ramen and the one specific quick meal Big Man actually tolerates.

There's a knock behind her; Frye turns to look just as Big Man unlocks the door and steps inside. "Ay! Ay. (Hello! Don't mind me,)" he says, closing the door behind him, "ay. (you guys weren't outside already, and I figured you wouldn't mind if I came in.)"

"Of course! No worries," she says brightly, waving a hand. "You're always welcome, Big Man! We're just waiting on SOMEONE," she calls, raising her voice and shooting a glare down the hallway, "to get READY!"

"Give me a MINUTE!" Shiver shouts back, poking their head out of their room to return her glare. Frye rolls her eyes, and turns back to Big Man.

"So. What'dya bring with you?"

"Ay! Ay. Ay. Ay. (Oh! I brought my Flip. And a flashlight. And some water.)"

Packing light, she sees. Fair enough; she and Shiver had their bases covered anyways. "Cheers, I'll drink to that."

Big Man barely begins to respond when Shiver finally emerges, dragging an oversized backpack behind them. "I told you I'd only be another minute," they sniff as they join the group, waving to Big Man before their eyes settle on Frye. "Are you *sure* you're ready? Is 'sleeveless denim' over a crop top really warm enough?"

"I'll be fiiiiiine. You know me - I'll roast before I freeze," Frye says, waving them off, before giving them a skeptical once-over of her own. "What about *you?* You start shaking like a leaf the moment the temperature dips, and that flannel's kinda light. You know how cold the desert gets at night."

"It's Nessie green, and I'm wearing layers. I'll be fine," Shiver lies, and Frye already knows who's gonna be her little blanket hog come camp-out time. "Besides, I can't change now, because-"

And, with a flourish, they reveal a new patch on the flannel and two identical patches in their hand - black squares with white text reading *Cryptid Research Team*, alongside three symbols representing each of their Splatfest choices.

"Woah! These are *so* cool!" says Frye, leaning in to look closer with wide, delighted eyes. "Why didn't I think of that?"

“Because you weren't shopping for Nessie-themed patches online,” Shiver says, perhaps a bit sheepishly - which makes Frye’s hearts burst with affection, because Shiver? Sheepish? That's something you'd *never* see on TV. It's this overwhelming surge of affection that makes her offer-

"Want me to drive so you can patch them onto our stuff?"

"If you don't mind me taking another minute to find a needle and thread, sure," Shiver deadpans. Frye’s expression shifts from disbelief to horror before they lean down and unzip a compartment on their backpack. "Ahaha. Just kidding. I already have some. I'm always prepared."

"Ay?? (How do you even plan to carry all that??)" Big Man asks, eyeing the backpack with some measure of alarm; Shiver smiles sweetly up at him.

"Oh, I don't. Now come be a good pack animal for me, won't you?"

Big Man’s jaw *drops* as Frye bursts into raucous laughter, almost falling over.

Together, the trio head out to the frankly decrepit van they'd bought just for this. You couldn't be an amateur cryptid hunter without an old van ready to break down on you at any second! Despite all appearances to the contrary, though, the van *does* start when Frye puts the key in ignition - so they’re off.

For a while, they just drive, watching the streets pass them by. They’ve got no real destination, so Frye heads west on 108, the three of them idly chatting as Shiver whips the patch onto Big Man’s hat and starts on Frye’s vest. It’s only after an hour, as the sun dips below the horizon, that Frye decides to start their usual pre-fest discussion.

"Sooooo. What's your bets, everyone? Who's gonna win this one?"

"Aliens," says Shiver, with such authority and confidence that it jumpscares Frye. "It's the correct answer. Mammals no longer exist, and everyone knows the Nessie photos are a hoax."

"They're *what!?*" Frye yelps, whipping her head around to stare at them; they lunge for the wheel, grabbing onto it with one hand.

"Please keep your eyes on the road," Shiver pleads through grit teeth, advice they definitely don't always follow, "but yes, the Nessie photos are a confirmed hoax. Lying about seeing her myself was, in some ways, carrying on a proud tradition in the history of Nessie sightings."

Frye wants to continue staring at them, but she obliges, turning back to watch the empty road. Something inside of her aches with their admission. Shiver *always* believed in their team. Even during Sweetsfest, when they knew she’d have an easy victory, they’d still maintained that spice was better. “But you love Nessie *so much*.”

“Yes, which is why I know the photos are a hoax.” Shiver shrugs, settling back into their seat to finish her patch, an air of nonchalance about them that she can see right through. “You love something so much, you want to learn more about it, so you find the article on Inkpedia talking about how sightings have been faked. It is what it is.”

But it shouldn't have to be, she thinks, even though it doesn't apply well here. She wonders how long Shiver has known. She can't imagine how she'd feel if she knew, with crushing certainty, that aliens weren't real.

There’s a lingering silence after that, only broken when Big Man decides to reveal - “Ay... (Personally, I'm not actually that invested in Bigfoot, so…)”

The van swerves to a stop. “...Ay? (...What?)” Big Man asks, sweating a little as both Shiver and Frye turn to stare at him.

Five minutes later, the two of them exit the backseat. “Here’s your vest,” Shiver mumbles, handing it over; Frye accepts, jerking her head towards the

driver's side.

"You wanna drive?"

"Yes," says Shiver, wearily, so they swap sides and climb back into the front. Behind them, Big Man pushes himself upright with a groan, pulling on the newly patched cap Shiver left for him. Frye clicks her seat-belt and turns to grin expectantly at Shiver, surely raring to go-

"...Frye." Shiver's hands grip the steering wheel, staring blankly into the distance. "Where are we going?"

"To hunt cryptids, duh."

"No, I meant," they gesture loosely at the road, "driving-wise."

"Oh." Frye leans back in her seat. "Dunno!"

Shiver's jaw goes slack, and Big Man tips back over. "*You didn't plan where you were going!?*"

"Do we ever 'plan' where we're gonna bandit? No! We go wherever our whims take us. Cryptids are the same."

"Some cryptids live in very specific locations, Frye," Shiver points out dryly.

"Okay. So where do Nessie and Bigfoot live?"

"...In a lake on the other side of the continent," Shiver mumbles.

"Ay! Ay. (Bigfoot lives in forests and mountains! Supposedly.)"

"Shucks," Frye mutters, snapping her fingers, "closest forests and mountains are in Inkadia, but that's the other way! And I don't wanna backtrack all that just to end up near *Inkopolis*."

"Ay- (I wouldn't mind-)"

"I'm in the driver's seat; overruled," says Shiver, firmly, before uncertainty sets back in. "Fine. I'll just… keep driving? Just tell me when to stop, I guess."

"Of course," Frye says, and then, because she *knows* Shiver works better with a plan, even if she doesn't - "up ahead - turn riiiight? There should be a sign; there's, uhhh, rock formations that way, we can climb 'em and see the stars better."

Shiver nods, shoulders untensing, and the van pulls back onto the road at a creaky pace. For a while after that, it's quiet.

"...You know, you never got to predict who *you* thought would win," Shiver finally points out, sneaking a glance at her. "Hoping for aliens, Frye? You haven't sounded this sure of yourself since Starterfest!"

This was true - Frye rarely cared about Splatfest results, and was too honest to pretend for TV. She had *extremely* strong opinions on Pokémon, and equally strong feelings about aliens - but…

"Eh, it doesn't matter who 'wins' to me. I win no matter what!" she says, kicking back and folding her arms behind her head. "After all, as everyone knows, Nessie and Bigfoot are aliens!"

For the second time that day, the van swerves to a stop.

"What the fuck are you talking about," Shiver demands, twisting in their seat to face her. "Tell me you don't actually believe that."

…Well, no. Frye believed in aliens, sure, because the universe was too big for fishkind to be all alone - but even she had limits to her imagination. Crackpots fishing for even the tiniest scraps of "evidence" to keep their cashseacow TV shows going blew past those limits by like, a mile.

But she's managed something else, a victory more sweet than any Splatfest win: she's gotten under Shiver's skin. And she is going to milk it for all it's worth.

"Oh? Haven't you heard?" She smirks, glancing at them from the corner of her eye. "They talked about it on this one TV show."

If she really wanted to play it up, she could've called it "interesting" - but that's

too far a stretch. Shiver squints at her. "...What TV show. Don't tell me it's that bullshark 'history' one."

Frye smiles as serenely as she can. "It has a lot of information about aliens!" Keep it together, Frye. None of this is lying! She's only spoken factual statements so far. She just needs to carry it across the finish line. Shiver's practically frothing!

"And you actually believe it!?"

Frye turns to look at them dead on. It is a mistake. "...Nah."

She can't do it; can't lie, not to their face. But apparently that's enough, because Shiver's expression cycles through all five stages of grief before settling on anger. "You know what? I changed my mind. I hope Team Nessie wins."

And, like a curse spoken into existence, that is exactly what happens a week later. "Congrats on the win!" Frye tells them after the cameras stop rolling, slinging an arm around their shoulders. "How're ya feeling?"

"...Like that was a dirty, dirty steal," Shiver mumbles, looking, frankly, shell-shocked. "That was - you should've-"

Frye waves them off, unconcerned. "I meant about Nessie being real."

"Oh." They start fiddling with their fan. "I mean, technically not Nessie. Nessie doesn't live near Splatsville."

And yet, there's something in their voice that they're trying to bite back - a tinge of glee, of the childish hope they'd lacked during Cryptidhunt. Frye grins.

"Eh, you never know. Maybe the rest of her alien-kind beamed her up and plopped her down here!"

It takes a moment for what she's implied to sink in - before Shiver glares at her. "Actually, I take it back. I deserved that win."

Frye laughs, sinking against them for support - and after a long, begrudging moment, Shiver laughs with her.

This, too, is a victory.

Losing Streak

story by n00dl3gal | art by Reefslide

Frye did her best to focus on the teleprompter, but she was more distracted than usual. The usual gaggle of Inklings and Octolings had their noses pressed up against the glass, watching Deep Cut record the Splatcast. They didn't bother her. Rather, it was the squidling by the director's chair. He looked positively bored.

"And that's it… for now," Shiver announced, tapping her fan.

The sound of the paper against wood shook Frye out of her daydream. "Ooh, spicy!" she said automatically.

"From Splatsville, that's a wrap," Shiver read.

All three members of Deep Cut stood for their sign-off. "Catch ya later!" they cheered in unison, striking a pose. The squidling yawned loud enough that the cameras probably picked him up.

As soon as the director waved that they were finished, Kusia sauntered over. "That was boring," he said, crossing his arms. "And you have to do this *every two hours*?"

"Ay!" Big Man explained.

Kusia looked at him strangely. "Ay?"

"Sorry, he doesn't speak Mantaguês yet," Frye apologized. "What he said was that it's hard work, but it's really rewarding. See all those people out there?" She gestured to the crowd outside the studio. She waved at them, causing a minor uproar. "We do it for them!"

Shiver scoffed. "Maybe *you* do, but I do it for a nice, big, fat paycheck."

"OK, I do it for the money, too," she whispered in her brother's ear. He rolled his eyes. "I'm gonna go show Kusia around, but I'll be back before the next session."

"Ay, ay!" Big Man requested. ("Bring me back a snack!")

"If you're grabbing food, I want-" Shiver started, but Frye hustled herself and Kusia out of the studio before she could get her order in.

The siblings blinked as the mid-morning sun beat down on them. Despite its many skyscrapers and towers, Splatsville's location was prone to sunlight. Frye couldn't actually remember the last time she had seen rain hit the city. Not that anybody *wanted* rain. The respawn systems were busy enough with Turf War battlers.

Kusia looked up as a plane passed by overhead. "Do you think Mom and Dad will be back soon?"

"I don't know," Frye said truthfully. "Why? Don't you like Grandpa?"

Kusia tugged his hood over his head. "It's the twins. They won't stop clinging to me. And they're *just* learning how to control their ink. This is my only clean jacket."

Frye punched his shoulder. "Aww, come on, they're kids. Lighten up a little. Besides, mom and dad being home isn't gonna change that they can't work their ink."

"Yeah, but then they can cling to *them* instead of me," Kusia complained.

"How's your eel training going?" Frye pivoted.

Kusia grimaced. "Horrible. They don't listen to me." He stuffed his hands in the jacket's pockets and mumbled something.

"Could you repeat that? Also, where did you wanna go first?"

"What, with those big ol' ears, you still couldn't hear me?" Kusia huffed, half-smirking. "And I don't care. Knowing you, you probably *do*

want to eat."

"Ha ha," Frye said dryly, linking an arm through his. "...You're not wrong, though. C'mon, I'll grab us snacks at Hotlantis. My treat."

"Of course, it's your treat, you're the one with a job," Kusia reminded her. Frye leaned over to give him a noogie, but he shimmied away. "Stop it!" he whined. "Don't you have a reputation or something around here?"

Frye ignored him, taking the steps down to the main thoroughfare two at a time. Kusia struggled to keep up, arm still entangled in Frye's. The bell above the door at Hotlantis twinkled as they entered. Harmony looked up and raised a single eyebrow. "...hey. He's new."

"He's my brother Kusia. Came to visit me in the studio." Deep Cut had a tense relationship with most of the bands from Inkopolis, but Frye didn't have a need to feud with Harmony. The Chirpy Chips were on hiatus, anyway. As far as Frye was concerned, Harmony was just another shopkeeper- albeit one who didn't actually own the shop. Or work there. Or get paid.

Call Frye greedy, but she couldn't imagine doing anything for *free.*

Kusia gaped like a trout. "You're… you're *Harmony*," he exhaled, eyes glittering like gold doubloons. "From *Chirpy Chips*."

"Yeah, I am," Harmony said. "...did you want anything?"

"An autograph?" he squeaked.

Frye tapped her foot annoyedly. "You never ask me for *my* autograph!"

"You're my sister, you don't count," he snapped back. He turned back to Harmony, already digging through his pockets for something for her to sign.

Harmony sighed. "I meant from the store, but… yeah. Here." She tore a piece of register tape off and scribbled her name down. "Anything else?"

Kusia was effectively frozen, so Frye took it upon herself to buy snacks for them. As Harmony rang her up, she grabbed a pack of Tableturf cards. "Feeling lucky today!" she announced, slapping them on top of the chips she bought.

Harmony looked at her and tilted her head. "...your total is 9,308 G."

Frye paid and left the store with a cheerful wave. She dragged Kusia out and threw him a bag of seaweed-flavored chips. "Let's see what I got," she mumbled to herself. She tore into the foil packaging of the cards with her teeth. "Hmm… oh carp, *another* Shiver card? She's never gonna let me hear the end of it."

Whatever spell over Kusia broke as they returned outside. He sniggered. Frye shot him a death glare, which he countered by sticking out his tongue.

"Have you ever gotten your own card?"

Frye nodded. "I actually have the original prototype or early draft or whatever it's called! We all do," she explained. "But I haven't unboxed it or found it in the wild. But Shiver? I have a dozen of them!"

"Sucks to suck," Kusia quipped dryly. Frye stared at him, disdain evident. He innocently popped a chip in his mouth. "You know," he said around the snack, "I've never actually played Tableturf Battle."

"You haven't?" Frye asked in disbelief.

Kusia shrugged. "Hasn't really spread back home. Only a few hardcore nerds out there play. It's more a thing here in the city."

"...is that your way of asking me to teach you how to play?"

Kusia ate another chip. “You decide.”

Frye grinned devilishly. Kusia gulped. “Well then, brother, prepare to get schooled!” She grabbed his upper arm and began jogging towards the Tableturf corner. “Be careful what you say to the person in charge. She's… quirky.”

“A bold claim, coming from you,” came the snarky reply. Frye elected to ignore him.

She led him through the back alleys, pointing out the corner stands that were only open for Splatfest. “This one sells something called ‘takoyaki,’” she explained eagerly. Kusia was barely paying attention, not that Frye noticed. “Big Man and I *love* it, but Shiver thinks it tastes weird. Ah, fried foods are *soooo good…”*

“You're named Frye, *and* you like fried food. Cannibalism,” Kusia joked. Frye resisted giving him a Wet Willy. They were approaching the Tableturf Battle spot regardless.

The staff welcomed Kusia happily, setting him up with a starter deck and explaining the rules. Kusia then began his first match against the Baby Jelly. Someone tapped on Frye’s shoulder. “Um, excuse me,” an Octoling with glasses and sandals said tentatively. “Do you mind, um, battling me?”

“What's your rank?” Frye asked, digging through her pockets. The Octoling confirmed it, and Frye nodded. “Let's do it! But I'm not going easy on you,” she warned.

It was a close battle, but ultimately, Frye was victorious. The Octoling thanked her profusely despite their loss. Frye waved as the Octoling walked towards Grizzco. She then turned her attention to Kusia. “How are you doing, Lil bro?”

Kusia pouted, glaring at the Jelly. “I want a rematch,” he said, in lieu of answering Frye. The Jelly shrugged as best they could and pulled their deck out again. Kusia stuck out his tongue as he concentrated. Frye had to refrain from ruffling his tentacles affectionately.

She also had to bite her tongue from backseat battling. It wasn’t as if Kusia was playing poorly, or even below average. The Baby Jelly was just exceptionally good. Frye wasn’t sure *why* he was the traditional first opponent. She supposed it was better them than someone like Lil’ Judd, at least.

When the Baby Jelly won again, Kusia threw his cards down. “No. I’m done,” he growled, pulling his hood over his head. He pushed past Frye and stormed towards the recording studio.

Frye blinked. “Do you need my help cleaning those up?” the staff asked kindly. Frye nodded mutely, bending over to lift one of the cards. It was of the SquidForce logo. Once all the cards were collected, she apologized and ran off after her brother.

There weren't many places for him to hide, and she found him quickly enough. He was crouched down in the gap between the subway station and the recording station. Frye spared a glance at the Splatcast set. Shiver and Big Man were nowhere to be seen. Frye silently thanked the stars.

Kusia had his hood pulled down over his eyes, face buried in his knees. Frye sat down next to him. He sniffed. He offered no other confirmation that he knew Frye was there. She wasn't concerned, however. She knew her brother. She knew his frustration. So, without preamble, she said: “You know how I host Splatfest?”

He nodded. “It's a big deal,” Frye continues. “Even on silly topics, winning feels important. And you know how many I've won?” She doesn't wait for him to respond. “I've won two. We've hosted… gosh, over a dozen by now, and I've won two of them. Last time, Big Man got *every*

single point. He *will not* shut up about it."

It worked, especially with the dramatically put-out voice Frye put on. Kusia huffs out a single laugh. "That sucks," he says solemnly.

"It *majorly* sucks," Frye agrees. "And it makes me wanna quit not just Splatfest, but the Splatcast entirely. I don't, though. Wanna know why?"

"Because Shiver would destroy you if you bailed?"

She punched him in the shoulder lightly. "That, and because you can't get discouraged. Sometimes, games are outside of your control. You have to have fun with them regardless." She held out her hand for him to grab. "Roll with the punches. It makes victory all the sweeter."

Kusia looked at her palm skeptically. "I guess… it's hard to not feel like it's your fault, though."

"Bro, I've *seen* the starter packs most people get, and they do *not* give you a fighting chance," she said sympathetically. Her arm was starting to get tired. She refused to let it show. "Since I have all those dupes if you want them…"

"Are you saying I should play more Tableturf?"

"If you want. But don't sell yourself short just because you lost two games." She glanced inside the studio. "I bet if you ask, Big Man and Shiver would take you up on a match." She stood, hand still extended. "Whaddya say?"

Kusia took it gingerly. "I can try, I guess. But they- I don't want them to go easy on me."

Frye threw her head back and laughed. "Trust me, they never would!"

Kusia cracked a crooked smile. Splatsville felt warmer, vibrant, and alive as Frye smiled back.

New Friends in High Places

story by writerofblocks | art by hunnyamai

The middle school principal's office had a staleness to it that always made Frye itch. The walls were a flat tan, the paint peeling from age, the clock clicking a monotone note as it clung to one of them. Frye's middle school principal was similarly stale- between the glasses chain around her neck and the prim bun tying up her graying tentacles, she carried the carapace of a grandmother with none of the charm. She shuffled a manila folder in her hands, peering at Frye over her tortoiseshell glasses. "Do you know why I've called you in here today, Miss Onaga?"

Frye squirmed in her plastic chair, the seat sucking at her thighs from her sweat. She rapidly sifted through her actions from the past week in her mind, wondering which of the ones she'd been caught doing that was the culprit. "Is it the dancing in the hallways between classes?," she tried.

"No, not that."

"Maybe the time I fell off the roof and splatted myself 'cause I was balancing on the fence?"

"No." The principal gave a long-suffering sigh as she rubbed her temples. "I believe you've learned your lesson from that incident."

Frye shifted guiltily in her chair. "Is it the treasure hunting in Undertow Spillway?"

The principal's eyebrows shot up. "The *what*, now?"

"Nothing," Frye quickly said.

That earned her another look, but the principal said nothing more about it. "It's your unexplained absences, Miss Onaga," she continued. She retrieved a calendar from the manila folder and pushed it forward. A number of days were circled with red ink. "No doctor's note, no official request. Some of these days you've been reported on campus in the morning, only to disappear in the afternoon."

Frye shrugged, twirling a tentacle around her finger. "Oh, you know. I have my clan duties and all that. Sometimes things come up."

The principal seemed unamused. "Really? Because I've been talking with your grandfather. He mentioned he specifically made sure to move your practices to days and times outside of school, so as to not interfere with your studies."

Whatever Frye was going to say caught in her throat with a strangled sound. "Urk." That was the downside to Splatsville being a tight community, size and messiness aside- everyone knew each other to some extent.

"And it's not just the absences. Several teachers have complained of missing assignments as well." The principal removed her glasses and folded her hands. "Miss Onaga. I'm well aware of your clan's cultural importance to the Splatlands, and your duty in upholding its traditions. However, I also have a duty in making sure the students who pass through these doors receive the education

needed to navigate this world. Are we clear?"

"Crystal," Frye mumbled. She itched her ankle with the toe of her other foot, trying not to look like she was desperately willing the wall clock to go faster.

"There's also the matter with Miss Hohojiro…" the principal began to say.

"Oh, no. You don't get to pin that one on me," Frye snapped, lifting slightly off her chair. "She was the one who threw the paper ball at the back of *my* head, not the other way around."

That earned Frye another glare over the edge of the principal's glasses. A part of her wished she needed glasses so she could do the same thing. "After you were called on repeatedly to read with no answer," the principal retorted shortly. "Rest assured I've talked with Miss Hohojiro about her behavior. This meeting is about *your* inattentiveness."

Frye settled back into her chair and stared at the clock again. Its hands hadn't moved anywhere, the second hand barely twitching.

"Miss Onaga." The principal's face was expressionless enough to win a poker tournament. "I'm not looking to punish you. I just want to understand why."

Previous lies were on the tip of Frye's tongue- that she was sorry, she'd do better next time- but something angry and bitter rumbled deep within her. "It's boring!" Frye burst out.

The principal's eyebrows flew sky-high. "Boring?"

Frye hesitated, but continued plowing on. She was one foot in the fryer already, she figured. Might as well jump all the way in. "Yeah. Boring. The teachers go through everything so slowly, it makes me want to melt into a puddle. Every time I'm somewhere, I keep thinking, 'There are so many better things I could be doing with my time. When I'm practicing with Gramps, I want to be cleaning my eels. When I'm cleaning my eels, I want to be exploring. When I'm exploring, I want to dance. And when I'm at school or doing schoolwork, I want to be doing literally anything else." Frye slumped in her seat. "I like dancing and singing. I like my eels. And I know school stuff is important, so why can't I just… stick it out and deal?"

Silence. Frye chanced a peek at the principal. To her surprise, there wasn't any anger in the principal's face- just a certain thoughtfulness. "Boring, huh?" the principal repeated, stroking her chin. "Okay. That's something that can be worked on."

Frye blinked. This… wasn't the reception she was expecting.

"What I see, Miss Onaga," she said, folding her hands, "is a young woman with passion and energy, who doesn't necessarily have a way to direct it towards things with longer term benefits." She stroked one thumb with the pad of the other. "I've had that problem at times myself. One thing that's helped is having friends assist me with reminders, solidarity, and occasionally a listening ear. Do you have anyone in your life who could do that?"

Frye thought to the handful of friends she'd cultivated in her class. Sure, they gossiped together about the latest trends, who was better in Turf War, things like that. But could she really rely on them for something like this? "Not really,"

she admitted.

"I see." The principal pulled up a calendar. "I'm going to schedule a meeting between us for next week as a follow up. This week, I want you to note the times you get distracted, and look into things you can do to keep yourself on track. The next time we meet, we can discuss a battle plan on how to catch up on your work, and coping strategies going forward." The principal's gaze softened. "You're a bright young Inkling, Frye. Your passion is evident in everything you do. I just want to see that same passion applied to your schoolwork."

Frye looked out the window, unable to meet the principal's gaze.

"I'll waive sending you to detention this time." The principal's expression went stern again. "However. The next time you decide to skip out on class, I will tell your grandfather directly. Am I clear?"

Frye cringed, holding up her hands in surrender. "Yes, ma'am."

The principal closed the manila folder and tapped it on the desk. "I won't keep you from lunch any longer. You're dismissed."

The speed that Frye left the office would have impressed Turf War frontliners. She swung by her classroom, forgoing her lunch bag in favor of grabbing her flute. Normally she was all about that lunch life, but after that meeting she needed time to think. And there was only one place in the school to go for that.

The door to the rooftop stood at the top of a three-flight set of concrete stairs. It was normally kept locked to dissuade young Inkfish from performing non-sanctioned Super Jumps (or from falling off, in Frye's case). Too bad it was easily pickable with the right know-how. Frye made quick work of the lock, pushed the door open and-

There's an Octoling on the roof. One tentacle covers one of her red eyes, while another tentacle is tied up in a ponytail. Her longer skirt and shortened uniform shirt gave her a delinquent look. She's holding a folding fan in one hand, her other hand extended outward as she sings.

Those are the details Frye would have noticed, had she not immediately started screaming in surprise. She flailed, brandishing her flute like a sword. "AAAUUUGGGHHH!"

The Octoling started screaming as well, holding out her fan as if it were a weapon. "AAAUUUGGGHHH!"

Then as suddenly as they started screaming, both stopped. A brief moment of silence passed as both Inkfish assessed the situation.

"Oh," the Octoling said. "Hi, Frye. What are you doing on the roof?"

Frye blinked. "Hi, Shiver," she replied, folding her arms. "And I could ask you the same thing. This is my turf at lunchtime, y'see?"

Shiver flared her fan and began fanning herself. "Really?" she countered. "Because I'm up here every other day."

Frye's ears went back. "Well, I'm up here every *other* other day, so it's

still my turf. And it's Eel Time now, so you'd better step off."

The intimidation tactic didn't work. If anything, Shiver looked more interested than scared. "Eel Time?"

Frye brandished her flute. "*This* is Eel Time." She took a deep breath and blew a tune into the flute. Almost immediately, a yellow streak of an eel shot up the side of the building, landing next to Frye with a *thump*. "This is Halwa! He's not the only one, though." Frye gestured to the edge of the roof. "The rest are down there. See?"

Shiver looked over the edge to the parking lot below. A pile of eels the same size as the one who'd jumped up to the roof lay twined together on the tarmac next to a massive Great White shark. Some of them looked curiously up at the pair, clacking their jaws in greeting when Frye waved to them.

"Neat trick. But I bet I can do better." Shiver leaned over the edge. "Oh, Master Mega!" she called.

The shark lazily opened one eye. He yawned, exposing a mouth filled to the brim with sharp teeth, then settled even further into his curled up position.

Shiver flushed a brilliant blue. "You rotten little- ugh!" she hissed, stomping her foot in frustration. The Octoling trudged over to one of the radiators and flopped on top of it with a dramatic huff. "Of all the times to disobey…" she grumbled, folding her arms into a pretzel with a heavy pout on her lips.

Frye stifled a giggle. With the way she was acting, Shiver seemed more like a little kid than a delinquent.

"We were only recently bonded, so he sometimes doesn't listen to me," Shiver admitted. She studied Frye for a moment. "But it seems like you and your eels have a close connection. I'd like to know more about them, if you're willing to share."

Frye hesitated. The last time she tried to talk about her eels with her friend group, they'd lost interest a third of the way through. "You really want to hear about them?" she asked cautiously.

"You just compelled a massive eel to jump three stories in the air and cuddle with you like a loyal sea slug." Shiver snapped her fan open with a flourish, fanning herself with it as she settled into her seat. "Anyone not interested in something like that is a moron, quite frankly."

Something warm swelled in Frye's chest. Someone wanted to listen. She wanted to scream in triumph and run around doing cartwheels and someone wanted to *listen*, someone *outside* her clan. What a feeling, nameless but *good* at the same time. She wanted to Super Jump off the roof on purpose this time, not caring if she splatted herself again.

Instead she patted Halwa's flank, laughing as Halwa chittered and pressed his cool, slimy face into her hand for scratches. "So!" she began. "Like I said, this Halwa. Fun fact- I actually raised him and his siblings from eggs…"

Squeaky Clean

story by AgonyAster | art by CatPersonArt

It takes nearly an hour for Frye to convince herself that getting out of bed is a good idea, and half an hour more for her to actually do it. It's only when the sun manages to sneak into her room through a gap in the curtains that she's aware time is passing at all, the sunbeam creeping closer and closer to her before finally reaching her face: bisecting it from chin to forehead.

She staggers into the kitchen and pulls last night's leftovers from the fridge, not even bothering to reheat them before popping off the lid and shoveling the cold noodles right into her mouth. Frye chews for a moment, contemplative, deciding that Shiver's soba is still great served cold before slurping down more noodles. She slides out of the way and the fridge door swings shut, her eyes catching onto the erratic movement of something pinned to its front. Squinting at the paper, the first half is Shiver's elegant handwriting reminding when she'll be back and vague threats about what Master Mega'll do if Frye doesn't feed herself all week. And then the rest of the thing, front and back, is a list of chores that go from taking out the trash to building the shelf they bought when they moved into this apartment.

Frye crumples it up and goes back to her soba.

She pauses only to settle down on the couch and to pick a fibrous chunk of takenoko out of her teeth, adjusting the chopsticks and diving back in, practically inhaling what's left. Frye sets the empty tupperware aside and glances back over to the kitchen— towards the balled-up piece of paper that's wedged halfway under the toaster. She frowns and flips on her side, turning her back to that stupid toaster and tucking her knees up into her chest as an uncomfortable feeling starts to worm its way up through her stomach. Frye sits with it for a few seconds. Then she decides that it's stupid and sits back up, grabbing her phone and clicking Big Man's contact.

Over on the mantle there's the sound of something vibrating against wood and a familiar 8-bit track fills the room: the remix of *Hide and Sleek* Big Man had been fussing with ever since he picked up chiptunes again. It's cute. She likes it.

Then she remembers why she's hearing it in the first place. He's out of town too: rehearsals with everyone in Manda Ryuu for a dance competition, a full week of practice with absolutely zero potential distractions. Frye snaps her phone shut and Big Man's phone stops rattling.

The nagging feeling is back again. It's not uncomfortable, not really, but it swims just under the surface of her skin, hardly there until she pays attention to it. Just *off,* like when someone misses their cue and they're moving a half-beat behind the music. She stretches out across the couch and flips her phone back open, absently scrolling across the screen until she settles on an app and starting to play. The dull clicking of the buttons and the bright colors are enough to keep her distracted.

But still… Before long her eyes pull down and away from the screen

towards her fingers. The momentary distraction is all it takes for the little fish to crash into a colorful branch of coral, the *Play Again?* button popping on screen. Frye doesn't pay it any attention, setting her phone to the side and inspecting her hands a little more closely. Only the barest tips of her fingers are still colored and even then they've faded badly, from their original stinging violet to a muted purplish-mauve. Maybe she'll redo them.

Still, she doesn't move. She stares for a bit longer until her eyes start to burn, and only when it's close to unbearable does she actually blink, the afterimage of her own fingers burning into the backs of her eyelids. Frye sits for a while longer, trying to ignore that itching, creeping feeling along her skin and the heaviness to her eyes. She doesn't know what it is that finally pushes her over that edge but it doesn't really matter, does it? She gets there, eventually.

Frye moves to the bathroom and starts to dig through the cabinet under the sink; she thinks that's where Shiver keeps all her fancy beauty stuff. It's not hard to find the tray of dyes but as she moves to pull it out, her elbow clips against the hard edge of something within the darkened shadows of the cabinet. It sends a jolt of white-hot pain spiking through her arm and Frye cringes at the sting. She looks a little closer at the perpetrator: a candy-colored box coated in a thin layer of dust, testament to how long it'd been since she'd taken it out. Dragging it out of the cabinet Frye fiddles with the clasps keeping the lid bound shut. If it had been so long… this is probably what she should be doing.

She tucks the chest under her arm and raises her other hand to her mouth, whistling a few cheery notes. It only takes moments until her eels start to wiggle through the open door. They're trying to get there all at once so *none* of them can, except for Halwa— little runt that he is. He headbutts her in greeting and twists around her arm, the rest of the swarm gnashing their teeth reproachfully.

"Come on everyone!" she chirps, ducking her head as she enters the wriggling mass of eel and pushing her way through. Hopefully they'll manage to keep themselves from tying their tails together: Gramps is the only one who could ever get them untangled in anything less than an hour.

At least Halwa is safe, she notes as he bobs along beside her.

It's only when they're outside and she's unpacking everything from the kit that Frye realizes she forgot, like, the most important thing for bath time.

Snatching up the aerospray she had tucked into the case she inks up the wall she best she can, swimming up the side of the apartment building, surging up to her floor and hopping off at the railing just outside the front door. The turf bags are right by the door and Frye flings all three of them over her shoulders, having to take the long way down or else risking breaking everything. Shiver would probably kill her for that.

She preps her ink tank with the fancy cleaning solution she bought a while back, attaches the hose to the tank and slips it onto her back. The sun beams down harshly on the back of her neck and as she straightens up, she catches Aloo gnawing on Samosa's tail unabashedly. Samosa doesn't

seem all that bothered by it, but it's the principle of it all.

"Knock it off! Play nice!" she shouts. When he ignores her, Frye rolls her eyes and fires off a warning shot. The water pressure is downright pathetic, even when she kinks up the hose and puts half her thumb over the nozzle.

Dang it.

Removing the hose from her ink tank— which has max upgrades for ink capacity, is ridiculously heavy, and isn't allowed within 20 yards of an actual turf lobby— Frye scoops up the discarded aerospray. She runs straight for Aloo and fires, peppering his flank with brilliant yellow ink— he lets out a startled bark and lets go of Samosa, dancing away. Frye giggles and gives chase, nearly tripping over her own feet as she continues to fire. But *someone*— probably Kulfi, it was definitely Kulfi— realizes that if they go up just a little more, Frye's got no way to reach them. It's only a matter of time before the rest of the eels follow her lead, gnashing their teeth and wiggling their butts tauntingly.

Frye *tries* a fizzy bomb but Samosa catches the thing in its mouth, crushing it easily and sending ink flying everywhere. Next to them, Puri's tongue darts out to clear the goop off her eyeballs.

Huffing, she reaches into Big Man's bag and pulls out a sloshing machine: an older model they stopped selling years ago, with a bulkier build and a raised lip around the edge. The shots travel slow and with a twist that sucks Daal's tail into its vortex, poor thing getting caught right in the center, spun around and spit out the other end with his entire body coated in ink. The autobombs she tosses out do manage to lock on to some of the low-floating ones, tottling after the eels with the sort of determination that only comes preprogrammed.

One last bomb explodes and she hits the threshold, lets her face split into a manic grin.

With a delighted cackle, she activates her special and adjusts the weapon in her hands, giggling as she toys with the trigger. These things are *banned* in Splatlands turf wars, but it's ridiculous how fun they are to play with. Aiming carefully, Frye raises the nozzle and fires. The recoil is instantaneous— sending her stumbling back a few feet as a jet of pressurized ink shoots out the nozzle and heads straight for Daal. They try to scatter but she *knows* them: they move in familiar, rhythmic patterns that Frye's been teaching them how to do since she learned to walk.

Frye traces their patterns with the sting ray, hitting every single eel with its beam, slicing through them with ease. The longer she holds the shot the stronger it becomes, shaking in her hands as it nears the end of its shot. Just before it dies out she manages to do another full pass on Halwa, if only because she caught him rummaging through the trash two days ago.

Just then, the special runs out of juice and she's left with the sloshing machine in hand. Panting, she sets it down, and when she glances back up she sees the eels rolling around in the puddle of ink left behind by her onslaught. The ink absorbs into their skin, a glossy sheen taking to their scales. Of course *now* they're interested in it, what a bunch of jerks. Still,

Frye can’t help but smile.

She grants herself a few minutes of rest and them a few of play before unhooking the ink tank from her back and emptying it out, wiping down Big Man’s sloshing machine with the fine cloth Shiver keeps stashed in her turf bag. It’s nothing more than busywork but it leaves her just as satisfied as she is after a shift at Grizzco’s.

Puffing out her chest and rising to her feet, Frye whistles, the sharp notes catching the eels’ eye. “Come on! Back up!” she instructs, gesturing for them to follow. And if she almost trips over her own feet climbing up the stairs, that’s no one’s business but her own. Dumping the bags by the door and leaving the cleaning kit on the counter, Frye heads straight for her room, eels trailing after her.

Falling down into bed, the eels pile in after her. She’s not quite sure how but all six of them manage to fit on there with her. Some of their long noodly bodies are left to dangle off the edge of the mattress, but they don’t seem to mind all that much.

She’s got the rest of that list to think about, Frye realizes as she yawns and buries her face into Puri’s side. It’s not like Shiver or Big Man are going to be back any time *soon*— a few days, at the least. And Shiver never said everything had to be done, didn’t say anything had to be done outside of feeding herself and keeping the apartment from burning down. Oh well. That’s a problem for tomorrow, or at least until it's late enough that common decency declares she isn’t allowed to vacuum. The ideal outcome, really.

Sweet Dreams (Are Made of Bliss)

story by yumeparadox | art by frushii

"*Team Sweet wins! Talk about a SUGAR RUSH!*"
Once the cameras stopped rolling and Deep Cut dropped their outro pose, Frye resisted the urge to leap to her feet once again, or roll across the tatami mats of the studio or any number of excitable actions her brain could conjure up in the moment.

The trio returned to their seats in fluid motion after Anarchy Splatcast filming wrapped up, waiting until the end of the hour before heading home as usual.

What surprised Frye was the simultaneous hug from her bandmates—making her accept the reality of the splatfest results. She had finally won her first event and it felt absolutely inkredible. Nerve wracking but inkredible.

"So, if we're all free tonight, why don't we go knock out that candy buffet?" Shiver asked, although her voice was muffled from in between Big Man's fins and Frye's shoulder. "At least we can say we tried it. It'll be my treat, pun intended."

It felt almost magical how the anxiety from the results announcement dissolved for a few moments as their warm embrace helped quiet Frye's restless mind. It was second nature to rush for her phone and see what the kids of Splatsville were saying on the internet—what memes were being made from their banter.

This time though, Frye wanted to bask in the moment. She'd check later on. So, throwing her head back with laughter, she shouted, "Yeah, let's make it a night to remember!"

Big Man was especially grateful they could find a train car to accommodate the three of them en route to Inner Splatsville during the evening rush. He turned to smile at Shiver while Frye leaped and bounded ahead of them, joyous as could be.

As the sun dipped lower in the sky at the halfway point between afternoon and evening, golden dashes of light flickered on the seats across from the trio. The monorail provided cozy travels, weaving in between industrial complexes and apartment buildings which zipped by in a blur.

Hushed whispers were heard from Frye as she showed off dazzling fan art of herself and a few selfies she'd taken with members of Team Sweet before halftime.

As part of her victory celebration, Frye decided to keep the pastel purple ink gradient on her tentacles for the rest of the week; it had been one of her favorite hues so far.

The length of their train ride succeeded in shifting the three into conversation about the diversity of sweets. Shiver—being the overly thoughtful octoling she was—insisted on having items selected from the online menu before they even arrived. This resulted in teasing from Big Man and Frye.

"Ay? Ay! (Not gonna let yourself be surprised for once? I wouldn't expect anything less!"

"Of course not! Saves me a lot of stress from being overwhelmed during the moment, thank you very much." She huffed.

Frye set her phone down in her lap and started to tap her fingers

on the seat. “I think I’m gonna go live on Inkstagram once we get our food! I wouldn’t have been able to do this without the fans, after all.”

“Gonna give them a muk-bang for free? At least make sure they can subscribe!”

“Ay. (I’d have to agree with Shiver on this one.)”

Frye’s tapping grew quicker as she blurted out, “They can support us in different ways!” She lowered her volume, quickly glancing around once she remembered they were still on the train. “I do what I want! Let me be silly!”

“Fine, fine. But never forget your worth, Frye. Not ever.” Shiver said with a smile.

“More like my net worth, am I right?” Frye responded, playfully elbowing Big Man who laughed in response. In mere seconds, their corner of the train car had erupted into laughter from all of Deep Cut.

Moments passed in comfortable silence until the group of three arrived at their stop—the eatery about five minutes away in walking distance.

The sweets buffet, aptly named Splash of Ambrosia, was an ordinary building that wouldn’t have stood out without the neon signs that flashed in bright pink—or the giant tower that was probably meant to resemble a spoonful of whipped cream to the left.

“It’s even gaudier in person.” Shiver said, wincing slightly.

Big Man shook them by the shoulders. “Ay ay! (Don’t say that out loud! We have a group chat for a reason!)”

“Okay, so you agree, then.” Frye dissolved into more laughter of her own. The trio were always able to bounce jokes off of each other like this on and off set, even while standing in front of a peculiar location where passersby were slowly starting to notice their identities.

In all honesty, it would be quite difficult to miss Big Man’s silhouette in the most packed crowd or dim alleyway.

Once they were inside, the staff practically rushed to attend to them and due to a little praise from Shiver they received the best seats in the house (definitely not because they gave out their autographs).

Frye settled into the middle of a curved bench, its seating plush to the touch, surrounded by Shiver and Big Man on either side just as they would sit during filming. It felt so natural. Soft chatter from the other booths let Frye’s thoughts drift away as she leaned forward onto the table.

Spicy vs Sweet vs Sour — this first splatfest of the year was a mildly anticipated event. How exciting it was to imagine what the remaining months had in store for her group; infinite possibilities bloomed in her mind. She remembered the smiling faces of all the inkfish cheering for them, their aspirations apparent in each determined expression.

The crew would hoist the 100x and 333x battle flags up onto Deep Cut’s floats and ready their cameras for commemorative photos—it was a new addition to the splatfest experience that thrilled Frye just as much. She might never get tired of seeing the winning teams run up to the terminal to book their next photo appointment.

Frye continued with her dance routine for it was etched into her soul, watching as inklings and octolings alike gathered on a platform below her, grinning with excitement. Some were admittedly a bit weary or downtrodden at times, expressing how they might need to take a break from the festivities.

In spite of their exhaustion, another teammate shouted, “We can’t stop now! Don’t you want Frye to win? Never back down, never what?!”

The inkling in lavender shook her head, flawlessly breaking the dance number as she decided to intervene in this scenario. Being the oldest of four siblings had its benefits when it came to speaking with younger children.

Frye bent down to their level. “Hey, hey, I know splatfest is only here once a month and you don’t wanna miss a second but I would rather my team fight for me when they’re all rested up.” She stated firmly, almost all in one breath. “I love your fire, love the attitude. Just please, take a breather when you need to. Alright?”

“But Frye—”

“Don’t you dare disagree! OUR QUEEN HAS SPOKEN!” An octoling nearby shouted.

Frye only brought a palm to her forehead and chuckled at the fan behavior before her. The sudden gesture caused one of the team members—an inkling wearing an M.C. Princess crown—to blush and hop off of the float with the rest of their group.

“Way to show ‘em who’s boss, Team Sweet!” Frye exclaimed triumphantly before returning to song and dance; the float continued its path through the Splatsville streets.

Each time her iridescent, purple platform passed the battle lobby, there was a new sight to take in—such as messages of encouragement on the sign boards purely devoted to her—that thrilled at every turn. Frye would always be fond of the electric sea of color left in her wake while she twirled to her heart's content.

On her regularly scheduled breaks, she contemplated sneaking into a few matches from time to time just for the initial reaction. Alas, idols were not expected to actually register for their own team. Were they idols? Not in the traditional sense—such a prim and proper title was reserved for Inkopolis celebrities.

What the three of them were doing by hosting splatfest traditions was not much different; Frye herself being a guiding light and beacon for the residents of Splatsville felt like a divine duty.

The clinking of glasses nearby interrupted Frye’s reverie and she was grounded in the present again—happily so as a tiny robot waiter rolled to their table with drinks. An assortment of multicolored glasses containing sparkling fruit juices joined their water cups.

An urchin dressed in server’s attire brought plates piled high with snacks out to the table promptly after. As to be expected, Frye had ordered a variety of desserts that spanned an array of cultures, some long lost from the human era but preserved nonetheless.

She began with a spoonful of *Basundi* (a sweet condensed milk dessert), enjoying how it melted easily after the first bite.

“Ay! (It’s so nice that they offer to bring out your first couple of orders!)”

“Right? Our darling Frye would get swamped with photo requests if she went up to the buffet right now.” Shiver chimed in while sprinkling chili flakes over an already spiced dish of curry, unwrapping a pair of disposable chopsticks next.

Frye felt her face flush with happiness and proudly crossed her arms, a determined look settling on her face. “Nothing I can’t handle! It’s an honor!”

Big Man brought his fins together in somewhat of a praying motion on the table, appearing to be in thought. “(Ay, ay?) Do you two ever just stop to think about how far we’ve really gotten? Not just as a trio. In our own individual stories and whatnot.”

Shiver and Frye looked across the table at the contemplative

manta ray.

"(Ay… ay.) I'm really… proud of you Frye. Yeah, Shiver makes sure we're paid for our time appropriately but we wouldn't be half as successful without your hard work and passion."

"W-What's all this? You're getting eerily nostalgic all of a sudden, Biggie." Frye laughed it off, despite feeling overwhelmed with emotion. Emotions she wasn't sure she wanted to let out on air or in a packed restaurant.

Shiver, intuitive as they usually were, noticed this again. "Frye, give yourself some credit. He's right and you know it." She sighed. "And I'm glad you won this one. I know you don't like letting others see you cry but… you don't have to put on your tough girl act for long."

"Whatever Shiv, you're one to talk! I could give you words of affirmation right now and you'd be too stunned to speak." Frye shot back playfully. She felt the corners of her eyes betraying her and stinging a little, however.

"(Ay! Ay…) Listen Frye, you deserve to be happy! Rub this win in our faces for like the next month or so… just not too much though…."

Admittedly, those words were all it took for the waterworks to truly begin. "Ugh, this is gonna get all over my sweets!" Frye whined, bringing her arms up to shield her eyes as tears still flowed behind them.

Shiver and Big Man leaned in closer—the octoling held out a stack of napkins and the manta ray patted a fin to the small of their friend's back. Frye relaxed then, experiencing both fond recollections of the past and the present moment's bliss.

"Thanks, both of you."

It was all hers to cherish—this sweet, sweet victory.

CREDITS

Meet our amazing team and find where to follow them!

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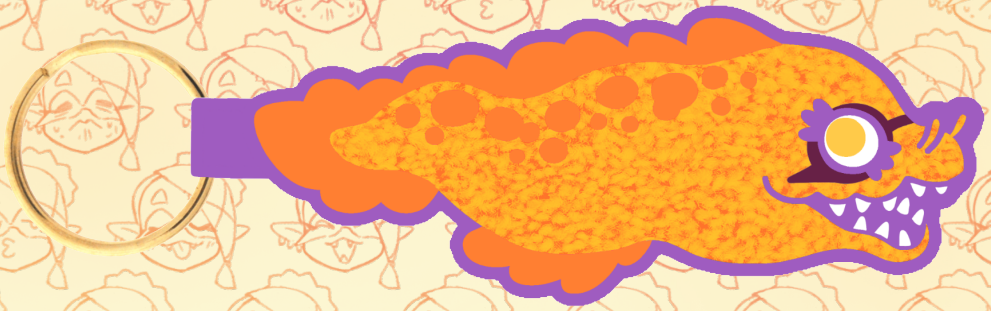

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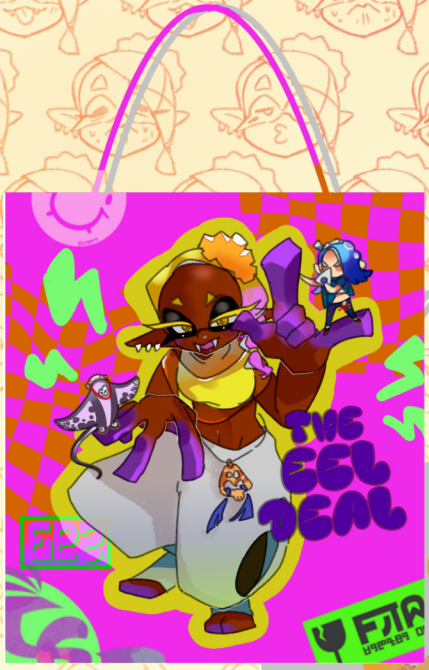

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Print (Left) by Choco
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Acrylic Standee by YObot
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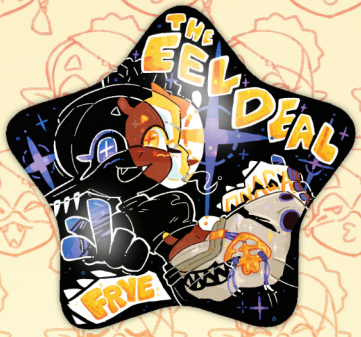

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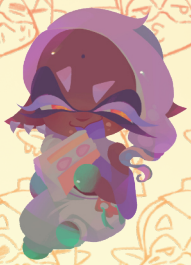

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THANK YOU SO MUCH!!

WOOMY!

Thank you for supporting Frye and her zine! This project was such a blast and we are so thankful to each and every one of YOU for helping this zine come to life.

We all worked super hard to bring you this incredible collection, and are so proud of what we were able to create. We hope you enjoyed all the artwork, merch, and writing pieces crafted in honor of our favorite idol Frye.

Thank you all again, and until next time...

...catch ya later!

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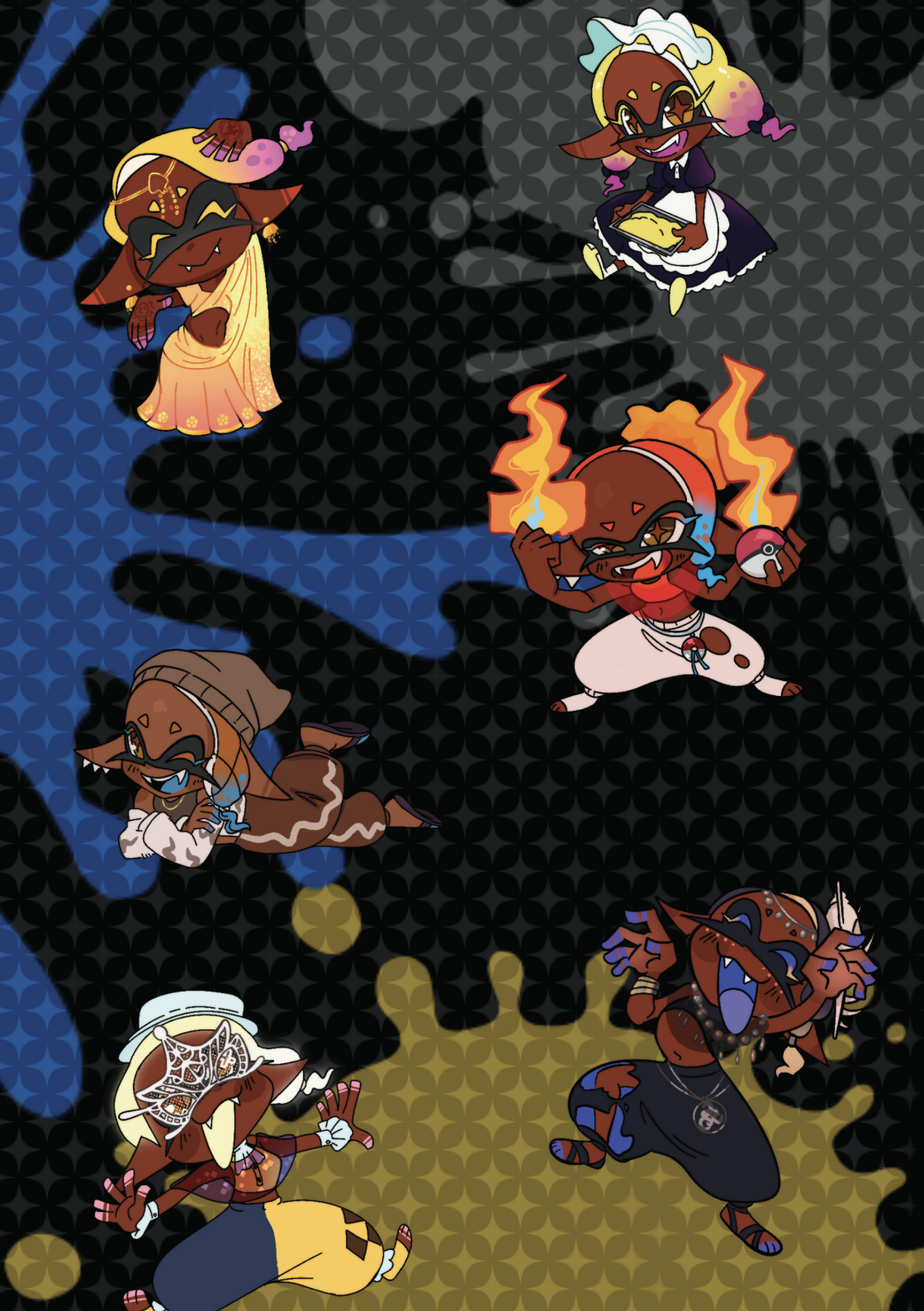
The Eel Deal Zine is dedicated in its totality to the people of Palestine and the movement for their liberation. All proceeds earned by this project will be donated to charities that provide aid for the people of Gaza. Thank you to everyone for your support on this project and for contributing to this humanitarian cause.

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